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The Art of Goalkeeping: Memorializing Lev Yashin

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Lev Yashin remains, in the eyes of many, the greatest goalkeeper ever to have played the game of football. Since his death in 1990, coinciding with the dying days of the Soviet Union, his legacy has played an important role in post-Soviet history, a factor that is gaining more importance as Russia prepares to host the 2018 World Cup tournament. Yashin's memory is notably being maintained in the public perception not least through the material form of two key sculptures erected in Moscow in the late 1990s. Yet these works, part of a wider international trend to memorialize footballers in the form of public monuments, offer more than a unique insight into Yashin's career, status and reputation. They also address concerns about the relationship between art and sport as it emerged historically in the Soviet Union and how that cultural legacy is being re-explored in a post-Soviet context. Accordingly this article examines these two key examples of football statuary as significant case studies through which issues relating to Soviet sport, history and art can be more widely analysed.

The death of a legend

On 20 March 1990 Lev Ivanovich Yashin, the man adjudged by many to be the greatest goalkeeper ever to have graced a football pitch, died in a Moscow hospital. He was just 60 years of age. During his career Yashin represented the Soviet Union in no fewer than four World Cup tournaments (1958-1970) and, to this day, remains the only goalkeeper ever to have been named European Footballer of the Year (1963).¹ He recorded over 150 penalty saves and kept over 270 clean sheets for both club and country. More importantly, he revolutionized the role of the goalkeeper by regularly advancing from his penalty area to adopt the position of a sweeper, a practice that has become standard in the contemporary game. Perhaps surprisingly, given Yashin's legendary status within the footballing world, his death was not widely reported outside of Russia. In 1994, however, FIFA honoured Yashin by naming him the sole goalkeeper for its fantasy 'World Cup All-Time Team'. This posthumous recognition was further reinforced with FIFA's simultaneous instigation of the Lev Yashin Award for the best performing goalkeeper at a World Cup tournament, later, more prosaically, renamed the Golden Glove. In 1998 Yashin was once again selected by FIFA as the goalkeeper for the notional 'World Team of the Century' and has continued to occupy that position in poll after poll.

Yashin's death was, immediately, and more keenly, felt within his home nation where his career achievements and reputation had long been celebrated.² In 1967, for example, Yashin was awarded the highest civil decoration, the Order of Lenin and was later installed as Vice-President of the Football Federation of the Soviet Union. Yet these official accolades, these State sponsored prizes and honorary positions, went somewhat against the grain of Yashin's personality. For amongst Soviet football fans his high status was accorded not only to his sporting prowess, but also to his somewhat eccentric personality, certainly in Soviet terms, and his reputation as a lovable rogue who notoriously claimed that his pre-match routine included having a cigarette to calm the nerves and a shot of vodka to tone the muscles. In Moscow, Yashin's death prompted an outpouring of grief and his funeral brought parts of the city to a standstill. Here it is notable that this tragic event came in the midst of major political turmoil. The fall of the Berlin Wall had taken place just four months earlier, and just a matter of days before Yashin's funeral, six of the fifteen Soviet republics elected to withdraw from the Union. Yashin's demise thus coincided with the first steps that would lead to the eventual break-up of the Soviet Empire. For many, his death thus symbolized far more than the passing of a great sportsman. It potentially symbolized the passing of the Soviet Union itself.

In the decade that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Russian nation underwent a dramatic social, political and economic transformation. Attempts at a transition to a free market economy, sporadically supported by western governments, generated a host of economic and political crises, and the euphoria that had broadly greeted the overthrow of Communism rapidly turned into a nightmare for all but the few newly emerging beneficiaries. As one Soviet historian wrote in 2002, the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet state might best be described as 'a story of political short-sightedness, unprincipled political struggle, ill health, greed and bad fortune'.³ In the city of Moscow, the old capital of the now New Russia, these changes were not only political and economic. New

cultural transformations contributed to an extensive reconfiguration of the city's urban landscape. Under the leadership of Moscow's controversial Mayor Yurii Luzhkov, new architectural temples dedicated to commerce cropped up throughout the city, epitomized by the huge scale, four-storey, underground shopping centre built beneath Manezh Square, the very area where both military and sporting masses had gathered in Soviet times, immediately before marching through Red Square at the annual parades.⁴ The revival, and rapid expansion, of the Russian Orthodox Church further contributed to this physical transformation, perhaps most famously through the rebuilding of the grandiose Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the very architectural monument that had been destroyed under Stalin's orders in 1931 to make way for the never-to-be-built Palace of the Soviets.⁵ But it was not just new buildings that contributed to this transformed urban infrastructure. The first decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union, also witnessed the appearance of a whole host of new public monuments springing up throughout the liberated capital. Old heroes, revered by the pre-revolutionary Russian establishment but despised during the Soviet era, now acquired a new-found status amongst a Post-Soviet generation as statues dedicated to orthodox saints, Tsars and nineteenth-century military heroes now adorned the streets, squares and tree-lined avenues of the new Moscow, replacing those dedicated to Soviet leaders that had been removed in the wake of the infamous events of August 1991.⁶ Yet amongst this plethora of newly celebrated heroes, one individual, perhaps above all others, continues to represent the glory days of more recent, Soviet history, seemingly bridging the gap between those who hanker nostalgically for a collective Soviet past and those who celebrate the individuality and 'freedoms' of Russia's capitalist present and future. For strikingly, during the late 1990s, not one, but two new public monuments dedicated to Russia's famous goalkeeping son, Lev Yashin were erected in Moscow. The first of these was installed in the parklands surrounding the Luzhniki stadium in the south-western district of Moscow in 1997 (figure 1), the second



Figure 1. Aleksandr Rukavishnikov, *Monument to Lev Yashin*, Luzhniki Park, Moscow, bronze, 1997 (photo: Nathan Gray)



Figure 2. Aleksandr Rukavishnikov, *Monument to Lev Yashin*, Petrovskii Park, Moscow, bronze, 1999 (photo: Regina Konovalova)

alongside the Dinamo stadium in the north-western outskirts of the city just two years later (figure 2). Both are the work of Aleksandr Rukavishnikov, one of the most prolific Russian sculptors of the post-Soviet era. In this article I want to focus attention on these two works, to examine them in detail both as individual works and within the wider context of post-Soviet public memorial sculpture, and consider how an emphasis on memorializing Yashin interestingly reflects contemporary concerns regarding sport, and football in particular. At the same time, I want to consider how the visual languages used in the production of these two strikingly disparate works address wider cultural concerns, drawing attention to post-Soviet attitudes towards the cultural history of the Soviet Union, and not least debates concerning both avant-garde and Socialist Realist practices in an earlier era and their legacies for the present day. Thus, a key goal of this article will be to bring together sport and art, two vital forms of cultural practice that in the West, at least, are frequently seen

as uncomfortable bedfellows. Here, however, the Russian context will be important. For whilst a notional distinction between the so-called 'high' culture of art and the more 'popular' culture of sport, has led many Western critics to separate maximally these two forms of cultural practice, in Russia, and particularly during the Soviet period, a fusion of sport and art was widely practiced. Sport, and football in particular, was a common subject for Soviet painters, sculptors, printmakers, designers and filmmakers, a fact that can be attested to by any survey of Soviet art produced from the Bolshevik Revolution right through to the dying days of the Communist state.⁷ Accordingly, this post-Soviet revisiting of the sporting legacy epitomized in Rukavishnikov's dual monuments to Yashin, thus not only reflects contemporary sporting interests, but also reinforces a dialogue with Russia's sporting and cultural past.

Football in the USSR

In Russia, the social identity and practice of football was radically transformed over the course of the last century. Beloved of supporters since the pre-Soviet nineteenth century, the game underwent considerable developments throughout the Soviet era.⁸ During the 1920s for example, revolutionary groups had criticized the sport specifically on the grounds of its pre-revolutionary, and thus to their mind, bourgeois, roots. Similarly, its competitive nature, not least its physicality and consequent potential to cause injury, was regarded as a suspect and potentially detrimental form of social practice for those revolutionaries who advocated collaboration and celebration as an important mode of new Soviet leisure. Football, it seems, whether played, or simply watched, risked corrupting revolutionary development.⁹ But football was also popular, particularly amongst the urban workers in whose name the revolution had been waged, and spectator attendances at matches during the 1920s made the sport far too popular for the Soviet authorities to resist.¹⁰ Thus, despite demands from the more extreme left revolutionary groups to ban the game, the Soviet authorities instead sought

to transform its meaning and significance, proposing instead that both playing and watching football was an appropriate socialist activity to inspire workers to improve their health and fitness. The expansion of international competitive football during the inter-war years provided another challenge for the Soviet authorities. Though initially hesitant to participate in what it regarded as a 'bourgeois' expansion of sport, the Soviet authorities early recognized how football could be deployed as a state-sponsored tool for international diplomacy. During this period, international fixtures were mostly confined to teams representative of international left-wing Worker organizations, as the Soviet Union refused to participate in the competitions organised by the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association).¹¹ Following the Second World War, however, and with the emergence of the Cold War, the Soviet authorities increasingly recognized the potential benefits of competing on the international sporting stage. The Soviet Union football team first announced itself on the world stage when it appeared at the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki. Four years later, in Melbourne, the Soviet team was victorious and subsequently competed at the World Cup tournament in Sweden in 1958, reaching the quarter-finals at its first attempt. By 1960, at the inaugural European Championships in France, the Soviet Union was once again victorious raising its first, and as things would turn out only, international trophy. Although the Soviet team would never reach the heights of the major international footballing nations, its performances at tournaments, throughout the 1950s and 1960s in particular, escalated the footballing reputation of the state. And it is no coincidence here that much of this occurred during Yashin's tenure as goalkeeper.

The decline of the Soviet Union's status in the international arena coincided with its own economic decline. This, in turn, was massively exacerbated by the early post-Soviet phenomenon described by Robert Edelman as the 'brawn-drain', the exodus of footballing talent to clubs beyond Russian (and former Soviet) territory.¹² In recent years, however, this

trend is being increasingly reversed as Russian oligarchs pour money not only into clubs based in Europe, but increasingly into Russia's domestic programme. Major international footballing talent can now increasingly be seen in the Russian league. The imminent staging of the World Cup in Russia in 2018 will doubtless contribute to a further resurrection of football in the nation, perhaps bringing crowds back to the stadia, if not guaranteeing international success and here, once again, football will be deployed as a state-sponsored tool for international diplomacy.

In this context, a focus on the representation of the Soviet Union's greatest footballing hero, Yashin, in Rukavishnikov's two monuments might be read as inspiring reflections on the gains and losses that this Post-Soviet transformation has brought about. Yet it should also be recognized that Rukavishnikov's broader emphasis on the sportsman as a suitable subject for sculptural memorialization in the public arena is far from being simply a local phenomenon. As Chris Stride, John Wilson and Ffion Thomas have demonstrated through their World Football Statues Database (part of the wider *Sporting Statues Project*), monumental sculptures dedicated to footballers can now be found across the globe from Algeria to Venezuela.¹³ The majority of these, as Stride and Thomas amply demonstrate, are part of a relatively recent phenomenon, the vast majority having been erected since the 1990s.¹⁴ This period has witnessed a vast expansion of the deployment of sports figure, and footballers in particular, as the new, publicly acceptable face of monumental sculpture. Part of the explanation for this may well be a shift in an academic, and wider popular, engagement with sport's history and individual memories, reflected not least in a growth in publishing in this area as well as the foundation and expansion of museums dedicated solely to sport.¹⁵ The growing celebrity status, and wealth, of footballers, particularly following the emergence of dedicated sports channels and the global provision of up-to-the-minute sports news through online web sources and social media has further contributed to the elevation of the football

superstar to iconic status. The concomitant decline in social respect for the monarchs, politicians and military leaders, the conventional models for monumental figurative sculpture throughout much of Europe during its heyday in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, has thus left a vacuum that, if the activities of the last twenty-five years are anything to go by, a consuming public certainly wants filled. In this context, Rukavishnikov's new monuments to Yashin conform to this global expansion of the sporting hero and thus need to be considered as both influenced by, and contributing to, this wider global phenomenon.

The principal aim of what follows will be to examine both these works as case studies, to consider what issues are raised not only by the decision to memorialize Russia's famous goalkeeping son, but also to explore the significance of the siting of these monuments, as well as examining the distinctive artistic styles adopted by their creator. Indeed these works, despite representing the same subject and being produced just two years apart, might be considered as radically different in conception and execution, thus facilitating very distinctive potential interpretations. Here, addressing two key issues might help to elucidate the wider socio-historical and cultural significances of these works. The first of these concerns the wider impact of the goalkeeper within Russian, and specifically Soviet, sporting history. The second, as an extension of this, will elaborate further on the important relationship between sport and art, and specifically the representation of the goalkeeper, as this emerged in the early Soviet period and how this might contribute to a wider understanding of the significance of Rukavishnikov's more recent interventions.

The goalkeeper in early Soviet culture

As Jonathan Wilson has rightly claimed, 'No nation idolizes its goalkeepers as Russia does'.¹⁶ Yet whilst Yashin's reputation has doubtless gone some considerable way towards reinforcing this paradigm, it should also be noted that a strong emphasis on the importance of

the goalkeeper in Russian culture preceded Yashin's appearance by some years. Indeed, the prominence of the goalkeeper can be identified not only in early Soviet sporting history but, more significantly, in the cultural sphere, in early Soviet literature, film, music, painting and sculpture. This early focus on the goalkeeper as archetypal hero can here be briefly demonstrated by reference to just a few of these early interventions. The first of these to make a significant impact took place in 1927, fully two years before Yashin's birth, when the satirist and sometime sports writer Yurii Olesha, published a highly influential novel entitled *Envy (Zavist')*, initially serialized in the Soviet literary magazine *Red Virgin Soil*. Olesha's novel is not fundamentally about sport. Rather, it acts as a satirical attack on the continuing influence of a bourgeoisie who refuse to accept the changes introduced by the new Soviet state, clinging instead to outmoded capitalist values. Notably, the key character introduced to contrast with this recalcitrant and anomalous presence, and to symbolize an emerging and transformed socialist mentality, comes in the form of a young goalkeeper named Volodya Makarov. This upstanding, hard-working, team-spirited and loyal character, a literary cipher for the Soviet New Man, notably carries explicit military connotations built on his duties as a metaphorical defender of Soviet ideological and geographical integrity. In a key episode within the novel, Makarov's heroic defence of his goal-line against the onslaught of a visiting foreign team, notably German opposition, explicitly forged an association of the goalkeeper with borderland defence. Olesha's emphasis on the goalkeeper as a signifier for the exemplary Soviet citizen in this widely read and officially praised novel thus established the groundwork for the status of the goalkeeper as a new archetypal hero in Russian and Soviet culture.

Over the next few years Olesha's novel effectively acted as a catalyst for the further development of this conception of the goalkeeper and perhaps its most famous manifestation in Soviet popular culture. In 1936, the box-office hit of the Soviet cinematic season was,

notably, a musical-comedy directed by Semen Timoshenko and entitled *The Goalkeeper* (*Vratar*).¹⁷ Trading on the widespread popularity of football in Soviet society, this film, like Olesha's novel, sought to foreground the goalkeeper as far more than a skilful sportsman, becoming instead a suitable hero of the modern Soviet era. Indeed, like his literary predecessor, Volodya Makarov, the hero of Timoshenko's movie, Anton Kandidov, is representative of the new Soviet citizen, a figure transformed by the changed political and ideological circumstances brought about by the Revolution. This concept is clearly mapped out in the final scene of the film as Kandidov, having initially lost the respect of his teammates after falling victim to self-conceit at his growing celebrity status, redeems himself by saving the day during a match played by a Soviet team, once again against German opposition. Predictably, the narrative concludes with Kandidov saving a penalty in the final minute of the game and thus preventing his team's ignominious defeat. Not content with this heroic exploit, Kandidov follows this up by throwing the ball up the field, chasing after it and scoring the winning goal against an opposition goalkeeper whose hesitation and indecision serves to reinforce the superiority of Soviet goalkeeping technique. Here, victory is truly snatched, however improbably, from the jaws of defeat. Timoshenko's film was intended to be read as far more than simply a celebration of the goalkeeper as the much-loved playing position of Soviet football fans. Rather it reaffirmed the metaphorical concept of the goalkeeper as the last line of defence, stoutly protecting the borderline as a means to ensure ultimate victory, a notion that resonated with the socio-political anxieties of the mid 1930s when fear of invasion from growing National Socialist forces was an all-too-real concern. And lest such a message be overlooked by cinema-goers of the time, a constant musical refrain played throughout the movie reinforced this message, the lyrics leaving little doubt of the import of the goalkeeper in a wider sociological context: 'Hey you, goalie, prepare for battle!/You're a watchman by the gate!/Just imagine that behind you/The borderline must be

kept safe.¹⁸ Notably, the impact of this light, musically insubstantial tune extended well beyond the context of the film for which it was written, becoming a major popular hit of the era sung by performers in nightclubs and by people on the streets long after the initial screenings of *The Goalkeeper*, thus keeping the concept of the goalkeeper as metaphorical defender of the Soviet state, and faith, firmly in the public consciousness. Yashin, of course, was a mere seven years old when Timoshenko's film was first released. He later acknowledged, however, that seeing *The Goalkeeper* as a child impacted significantly on his decision, along with that of countless other Soviet youngsters of the time, to dedicate his life to becoming a goalkeeper.

This popular, heroic image of the goalkeeper would also extend beyond literature, cinema and music to play a significant role in Soviet art as painters similarly responded to this growing characterisation of the goalkeeper as the archetypal hero of the Soviet Union. This can briefly be demonstrated by reference to two strikingly different works produced either side of the conflict known in the Soviet Union as the Great Patriotic War. In 1934 Aleksandr Deineka, one of the Soviet Union's most famous artistic exponents of the sports theme, produced a large scale canvas dominated by the colossal figure of a diving goalkeeper (figure 3). Here, Deineka focused explicitly on the representation of the gravity-defying leap of the

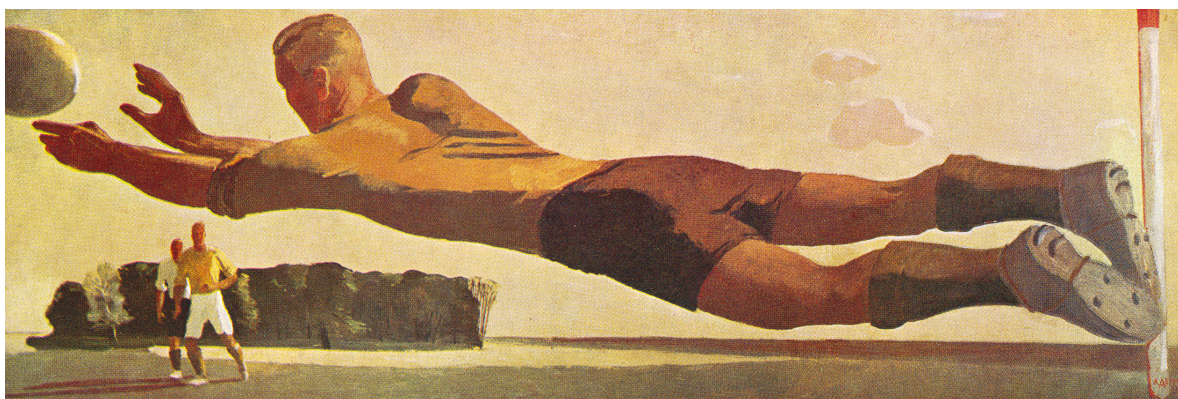


Figure 3. Aleksandr Deineka, *The Goalkeeper*, State Tretyakov Museum, Moscow, oil on canvas, 1934

goalkeeper, a notable emphasis at a time when the Soviet aviation programme was at its height. Exhibited at his one-man exhibition in Moscow and Leningrad in 1936, and reproduced in the art journal *Iskusstvo* that same year, Deineka's work further contributed to the conception that sport could not only serve as an appropriate subject for Soviet artists, but also that it could stand metaphorically for wider sociological concerns.¹⁹ This notion was further reinforced in a different context in 1949 when Sergei Grigorev produced a sentimental vision of post-war Soviet society again articulated through an emphasis on the goalkeeper (figure 4). Situated on a piece of unidentified scrubland on the margins of an unknown city, Grigorev represents children indulging in a game of football watched by what appears, from the medals on his jacket, to be a demobbed, decorated war hero. The bandaged knee of the youthful goalkeeper, like the scarred land on which this game is played, serves to remind the viewer of the price paid in defending Soviet lands from its wartime enemies. The opponent, presumably about to take a penalty or shot at goal, is completely excised from the image,



Figure 4. Sergei Grigorev, *The Goalkeeper*, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, oil on canvas, 1949

despite the fact that the gaze of every character within the scene is focused firmly on this absent figure. Here, once again it is defence that counts and despite the obvious support of his comrades, it is the goalkeeper who must face this opposition in his duty to defend the wider collective.²⁰

To return to Rukavishnikov's more recent representation of Yashin, it is of course important to consider what precedents had been established specifically in sculptural practices. Once again, it was during the inter-war years that the goalkeeper emerged as a significant figure within this artistic mode. In 1928, a young, avant-garde inspired sculptor, named Iosif Chaikov, produced a fascinating small statuette representing two footballers tackling for a ball (figure 5). Although executed in a loosely defined style both figures appear to represent outfield players. The timing of the production of this work suggests that it was a direct response to the staging of one of the Soviet Union's most significant, early international sporting events to feature football. The First Workers' Spartakiad, held in Moscow that year, was staged by the Red Sport International and notably planned to compete with the Olympic Games in Amsterdam.²¹ Football, always the most popular spectator sport in Russia both before and after the Bolshevik Revolution, proved to be the major attraction in terms of crowd attendance and press coverage.²² Local interest was further ensured by the organisation of the competition which created two groups; the first consisted of international sides, including workers' amateur teams from Uruguay, Spain and Switzerland alongside Soviet Republics such as Georgia and Ukraine; the second only Russian teams. As both group victors would play in the final, a Russian presence was thus guaranteed. The tournament ended with a combined Moscow team defeating a Ukrainian national side 1-0. But it is Chaikov's material response to this that is of most interest here, not least as an early intervention that explicitly brought together two distinct forms of practice, art and sport. In stylistic terms, Chaikov's *Football Players*, though figurative in form, openly embraced



Figure 5. Iosif Chaikov, *The Football Players*, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, plaster, 1928



Figure 6. Iosif Chaikov, *The Football Players*, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, bronze, 1938

many of the values of the early Soviet avant-garde. Here the anonymous sporting figures create a whirling, spiral, geometric form evoking movement and interpenetrating space and a sense of weightlessness. Significantly, all of this came at a time of intense cultural debate between supporters of an artistic avant-garde and those who sought to introduce a more legible, popular and realist approach to art practices. In this context, Chaikov's work sought something of a compromise, advocating a new cultural model that retained some of the formal, experimental stylisations adopted by the early Soviet avant-garde yet simultaneously foregrounding figuration and a popular subject to make the work accessible to wider audiences. The Soviet art critic Aleksandr Romm notably designated this stylistic compromise, 'constructive realism', thus bringing together what many art critics at the time regarded as opposing forms of cultural practice.²³ Chaikov's seemingly oxymoronic synthesis of avant-garde and realist styles proved, however, to be somewhat ill-timed. By the early 1930s, the avant-garde had largely been rejected by the Soviet authorities and in 1934, Socialist Realism was declared the only official form of culture acceptable to the State.

Chaikov's 'constructive realism' was thus largely abandoned as a project, though not entirely and not for long. Four years later, in 1938, Chaikov was awarded a prestigious commission to produce an over life-sized statue to be displayed in the Soviet Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. Intriguingly, he decided to rework his earlier representation of football players. In this new version of the *Football Players*, however, the lower of the two figures became more explicitly defined as a goalkeeper, identifiable as such by the costume details of gloves and woollen jersey (figure 6). Chaikov's new version aptly captured the sense of movement and dynamism typical of sporting practices and proved popular in New York. On its return to Moscow, too, it was widely celebrated and installed in a prominent public position outside the Tretyakov Gallery. Here, like Rukavishnikov's monument to Yashin, it became an integral material artefact within the urban landscape of the city, explicitly reinforcing links between the practices of art and sport.

Rukavishnikov's Interventions

But what significance might this wider history of the representation of the goalkeeper in Soviet visual culture carry for Rukavishnikov's more recent monuments to Yashin? Here I want to turn attention first to Rukavishnikov as an artist, and then to offer a more detailed analysis of the two monuments erected in the late 1990s, in particular, giving consideration to the differences between the first and second versions.

Aleksandr Rukavishnikov's family background may well have predisposed him to a career as a sculptor. Both his great-grandfather Mitrofan, and grandfather Iulian were sculptors, as were both his parents, his father, Aleksandr and mother, Angelina Filippova-Rukavishnikova.²⁴ Thus from an early age, the younger Rukavishnikov was exposed to a variety of sculptural traditions dating back through the entire history of the Soviet Union and to the pre-revolutionary period. The stylistic transitions from nineteenth-century academic

sculpture, through the early post-revolutionary avant-garde to the official Socialist Realism of the post 1930s Soviet Union, were thus familiar to Rukavishnikov not only through an education in sculptural history but also directly through his family heritage. Whilst there is no evidence to suggest that any of Rukavishnikov's forbears produced works on the sporting theme, his mother did produce sculptures of dancers and ballerinas, and Rukavishnikov himself produced at least two works referencing sport several years before producing the Yashin monument. In 1977, for example, his Cubist-inspired work dedicated to the famous karate Instructor Vitalii Pak was purchased by the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and at around this time he also produced a white marble sculptural portrait of the Russian athlete Tamara Bykova.²⁵ But it was in the later 1990s that Rukavishnikov's attention was first focused on football and the Soviet Union's goalkeeping legend.

Notably, the 1997 Yashin monument was not a single commission but rather one of three works dedicated to famous Moscow-based Soviet footballers, all produced by Rukavishnikov between 1996 and 1998. Along with the other two works, dedicated to Spartak's Nikolai Starostin and Torpedo's Eduard Streltsov, the Yashin monument was thus part of a triumvirate with all three monuments situated within close proximity to each other in the parkland surrounding the Luzhniki stadium. Thus, in order to understand the significance of this first Yashin monument, it needs to be considered within the context of this wider collective. The earliest of these, both in terms of completion (1996) and subject matter, represents the eldest of the four famous Starostin brothers, all of whom played for Spartak, Dinamo Moscow's biggest rivals, during the 1930s (figure 7). Spartak had been formed in 1934 and came to prominence after the formation of an official Soviet league two years later. Notoriously, the success of Spartak, generated largely by the participation of the Starostins, and later the leadership of Nikolai, drew the ire of the head of the Soviet secret police, Lavrentia Beria, not least as it was his Dinamo team that mostly suffered at the hands of

Spartak's success. This probably contributed to the arrest and exile of all four footballing brothers, none of whom were released until after the death of Stalin in 1953. The now forty year-old Nikolai was sent to the Siberian Ukhta camp, which reportedly witnessed forty deaths a day.²⁶ But how might this historical context impact upon an engagement with Rukavishnikov's monument? Here, the emphasis is not on Starostin at a moment of play. Rather he is represented seated on a bench with his shirt and one boot already removed and a



Figure 7. Aleksandr Rukavishnikov, *Monument to Nikolai Starostin*, Luzhniki Park, Moscow, bronze, 1996 (photo: Nathan Gray)



Figure 8. Aleksandr Rukavishnikov, *Monument to Eduard Streltsov*, Luzhniki Park, Moscow, bronze, 1998 (photo: Nathan Gray)

towel drapped, scarf-like, around his neck. In this way, the monument notably foregrounds physical exhaustion, thus alluding to camp labour whilst simultaneously emphasizing the side-lining of Starostin; the player is literally benched whilst looking on with a dignified, yet wistful, expression to an imagined game.²⁷ Rukavishnikov's monument thus references the tragedy of the camp imprisonment and the lost years of Starostin and his brothers, and by extension, countless victims of the late Stalinist period.

Rukavishnikov's monument to Streltsov was the last of the three monuments to be completed and also represents the youngest of the Soviet footballers in this triumvirate (figure 8).

Streltsov shot to fame in 1955 when he made his international debut at the age of just 18, having already played two seasons for Torpedo Moscow. The following year he was part of the famous Soviet Union squad, alongside the more senior Yashin, that won gold at the Melbourne Olympic Games, scoring the vital equalizing goal against Bulgaria in the semi-final. By 1957, Streltsov was being hailed internationally as one of the best players in Europe. That same year, however, he was arrested and charged with the horrific offence of raping a young woman at a team party. He was swiftly sentenced to twelve years imprisonment. Various conspiracy theories have been put forward in the post-Soviet era to explain this incident, some arguing that Streltsov was set up after refusing to transfer his allegiance from Torpedo to Dinamo, others that his refusal to marry the daughter of a high-ranking official put him in the firing line.²⁸ Whatever the truth behind the story, Streltsov was served a five-year term, and returned to play for Torpedo in 1963, helping an already successful team win the Soviet championship in his first year back. But Streltsov was far from rehabilitated in the State's eyes. Having missed both the 1958 and 1962 World Cup tournaments as a consequence of his incarceration, he was now prohibited from participating in the 1966 World Cup, although he was finally allowed to return to the national team the following year. Thus Streltsov's sporting career, similar to Starostin's, might be characterized as one punctuated by absence, interruption and a failure to participate on the biggest stage. And once again, Rukavishnikov's monument makes an interesting allusion to these



Eduard Streltsov (photograph)

circumstances. Unlike the ‘benched’ Starostin, Streltsov is represented in action, his deft body-swivel suggesting a moment of dynamic action on the field of play. The form is loosely based on a photograph featuring Streltsov playing for his country (figure 9). However, the differences between the original photograph and the final monument are telling. In the monument, the ball is tucked beneath Streltsov’s feet whilst his gaze is distracted away from the immediate action. Here,

Streltsov’s contact with the ball seems perhaps more clumsy than poised, more hesitant than sure, as if the player is captured at a moment of transition, at a crossroads in his career. Does this potentially imply a moment of distraction for the player, whether conceived as relating to the horrific incident that led to his arrest, or indeed of an offer to change clubs? However interpreted, Rukavishnikov’s monument to Streltsov nonetheless seems to suggest a lost opportunity more than a moment of triumph and ultimate victory.

Rukavishnikov’s first monument to Yashin, should thus be read within the context of these accompanying works, the famous goalkeeper being framed by Starostin and Streltsov both in terms of his age and career, as well as the date of production of each work. But what does the form of this monument tell us about Yashin? Firstly, it presents him in a very down-to-earth manner. Although represented as over-life sized, the goalkeeper is here shown at an ordinary, even passive, moment, perhaps in a game, perhaps in training. Though dressed in a football kit he appears as if strolling nonchalantly through the parkland in which the monument is sited. As with the monuments to Starostin and Streltsov, Yashin is not presented on a plinth, the conventional means by which monuments are literally, as well as metaphorically, elevated above the mundane physical world. This reinforces the notion of Yashin as an

ordinary, approachable, everyday citizen, a characterization in stark contrast to the celebrity-driven, alienated and remote identities of modern-day footballers. Here it is almost as if the spectator has accidentally bumped into Yashin whilst he is playing a casual game in a public park. In contrast to the physical exhaustion of Starostin, and the dramatic change of direction of Streltsov, Yashin is presented in an upright posture, reflecting a solidity, confidence and groundedness that seems to belie the athleticism and acrobatic skills for which Yashin was so renowned in his career. Indeed the only significant reference to his outstanding abilities as a goalkeeper might be seen in the secure grip with which his huge hands contain the diminutive ball. Rukavishnikov overtly emphasizes Yashin's heavily strapped knee, reinforcing the notion that this is Yashin towards the latter part of his career. Certainly Yashin suffered from knee injuries and frequently appeared with one, or even both, of his knees heavily strapped. This emphasis on Yashin's strapped right knee foregrounds the less than ideal physique of the world's greatest goalkeeper, emphasizing his frailties. Significantly, this draws attention to an aspect of Yashin's later life widely known throughout Russia. Following his retirement, Yashin's less than healthy lifestyle, his propensity to smoke and drink vodka, finally caught up with him when, at the age of just fifty, the blood vessels in his right leg became gangrenous as a consequence of a blockage widely believed to have been caused by his excessive smoking habit. By 1984, it became necessary to amputate the leg. In this context, Rukavishnikov's 1997 monument carries a biographical point of reference, foregrounding both the humanity and the tragedy of Yashin's later life and eventual early demise. Indeed the stiffness of the strapped leg in the monument seems almost to prefigure the later physical demise brought to bear on Yashin. At the same time this allusion to injury, and indeed foreshadowing of later amputation, reaffirms the militaristic associations so typically embedded within earlier conceptions of the goalkeeper as defender of the borderline. Rukavishnikov's first monument to Yashin thus emphasizes the modesty, humanity and

physical vulnerability of an individual, in preference to representing a heroic individual capable of extraordinary physical exploits. Like the companion-piece monuments to Starostin and Streltsov, this work carries overt connotations of tragedy and loss, emphasizing the footballer as having both suffered through, and risen above, the trials and tribulations of Soviet history.

A short while after the unveiling of Rukavishnikov's first monument to Yashin, the sculptor was commissioned to produce a second work, this time to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of Yashin's birth. This monument, initially erected alongside the north stand of the Dinamo stadium, the home ground where Yashin played the majority of his games throughout his career, presents a striking image of the Soviet goalkeeper somewhat at odds with the earlier version. Here Yashin has notably been rejuvenated, presented as he appeared in his early career, wearing the workers' flat cap and ordinary gloves typical of this time.²⁹ The vulnerability of his physique is no longer in evidence here. Indeed, Yashin is depicted at the very apex of a gravity-defying leap, his right fingertips making just sufficient contact with the ball flying above him to convey to the spectator the idea of a glorious save. As in the earlier work, the people's goalkeeping hero is presented without a plinth, though this time the figure is notably elevated, held in mid-air by the metal, netted structure that evokes the goal that Yashin is ostensibly defending. And yet, this very structure signals something of a problem. If read literally, as the post, crossbar and net of a goal, then Yashin's efforts seem, at best, superfluous. After all, if the ball is going wide and above the goal, Yashin's save might thus be read as unnecessarily giving away a corner. But here it can be argued that the inclusion of this, at first glance, peculiar structure operates on several metaphorical levels, simultaneously signifying a number of potential ideas relating not only to football, but also, once again, to a wider cultural and artistic heritage. At a basic level the pyramidal structure evokes a mausoleum, an evocative form frequently deployed in funerary sculpture. In art

historical terms, perhaps the most important manifestation of this is Antonio Canova's pyramidal mausoleum in the Basilica of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, originally designed as a funerary monument to commemorate the great Italian Renaissance painter Titian. After Canova's death, however, the work that had not been completed in his lifetime was constructed as a tomb in which the sculptor's own heart was interred. Whilst this early nineteenth-century Italian cultural precedent may seem a little remote, when considering the memorialization of a Soviet goalkeeper, a more resonant context might also be introduced here. In contemporary Russia, debates still rage regarding the continuing presence of Lenin's corpse, in its pyramidal mausoleum situated at the heart of the capital. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent removal of countless public monuments to representatives of the Soviet state, the position of Lenin's corpse has generated constant controversy. In 1999, fully eight years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and notably the same year that Rukavishnikov's second monument to Yashin was unveiled, the Russian President Boris Yeltsin publicly intervened to call for Lenin's corpse to be removed from the mausoleum and buried alongside his mother at the Volkov cemetery in St Petersburg.³⁰ Yeltsin's argument that it was 'neither humane nor Christian' to display Lenin's corpse in public, outraged many former communists and the President quickly backed down.³¹ When Vladimir Putin succeeded Yeltsin that same year his support for the retention of the mausoleum effectively put an end to the debate, although polls conducted since 2011 suggest that the tide of opinion is now turning towards the removal of Lenin's corpse from Red Square (*The Guardian*, 15 May 2013). In this context, Rukavishnikov's decision, in 1999, to represent the figure of Yashin floating effortlessly above this evocative pyramidal, funerary form seems, at the very least, a nod to Soviet history whilst simultaneously evoking the post-Soviet revival of religious orthodoxy. Yashin's ascension alludes to his almost saint-like qualities. Yet this ambiguous form also allows for other alternative interpretations. For

example, the elongated form of the net itself, with its narrow entrance and tunnel-like depth, might perhaps also be read as suggestive of a dangerous trap, even a spider's web, inhabited solely by the figure of Yashin himself. This clearly echoes one of Yashin's most famous nicknames, the 'Black Spider', alluding not only to the black goalkeeping jersey he usually wore when playing, but also to his capacity to scuttle across the goal and keep out shots with both his arms and legs. But to consider the wider potential significance of the monument it might also be useful to explore more deeply the geographical location of the monument and to consider further the important relationship between sport and art in the Soviet Union.

Positioning Yashin directly outside the Dinamo stadium made straightforward historical sense. After all, he was a one-club man, born in the Soviet capital just one year after the stadium was opened, and who spent his entire career playing for Dinamo Moscow. However, the Petrovskii Park region of northern Moscow, in which the Dinamo stadium and Yashin's monument still stand, has a wider history that intriguingly unites both sport and art practices. In the 1920s, this region was developed specifically to facilitate the building of Russia's first major stadium, the constructivist masterpiece, Dinamo stadium, opened in 1928 in time for the aforementioned First Workers' Spartakiad. But this was always designed to be far more than just a sport stadium. Indeed the whole surrounding area included sports fields and training facilities, making the region something of a sport city, an enclave designed specifically for the practice, as well as the spectatorship, of sport. Within a decade, a new Metro line had been completed to connect the centre of the city to its sporting region with no expense spared on the marble-clad design of the new Dinamo metro station.³² Coinciding with this development of the Petrovskii Park sport space, another series of buildings was also being erected just across the road on Ulitsa Verkhnyaya Maslovka. Pursuing an idea initially proposed by the writer Maksim Gorkii and the painter Isaak Brodskii, this area was specifically designated as an artists' community and included studios, apartments and even an

official *Dom Khudozhnikov* (House of the Artists). Shortly after its completion the famous constructivist and avant-garde artist Vladimir Tatlin became one of the area's newest residents. Over the ensuing years this region, widely described as a 'ship of the arts', became home to the majority of the Soviet Union's most famous painters and sculptors. Intriguingly, like Dinamo stadium itself, many of the new buildings deployed a constructivist-inspired architectural style widely embraced throughout the 1920s, though rejected from the 1930s onwards.

All of this offers a historical context in which the form of Rukavishnikov's monument acquires a more complex significance. Like Chaikov before him, Rukavishnikov's second monument notably deploys a conventional figurative style in its articulation of Yashin. At the same time the more abstracted geometric forms that define the goal area simultaneously reference early Soviet cultural experiments, not least those associated with the works of the Constructivist movement of the 1920s. Where Romm had earlier defined Chaikov's hybrid style as 'constructive realism', Rukavishnikov, as Ivitsa Radinovich has pointed out, has adopted a similarly hybrid term 'free realism' to describe his own practice.³³ The siting of Rukavishnikov's second monument to Yashin thus reinforces this allusion to Constructivist history, and notably at a time when Constructivist works, consigned during the late Soviet era to museum basements, were themselves being largely rehabilitated in post-Soviet museum displays. In this context, the second Yashin monument might usefully be read as a nostalgic reflection not just for Soviet sporting history, but also for a wider history of Soviet culture and art.

Moving forward to Russia 2018

In 2008, less than a decade after the unveiling of Rukavishnikov's second monument to Yashin, Moscow's Dinamo stadium was officially closed as plans were put in place to

demolish the old stadium to make way for a new multi-billion dollar sports complex surrounded by cafés, restaurants, shops, offices, apartments and a pedestrian zone. Sponsored by Russia's second largest bank, the new complex will be named the VTB Arena, although there have been suggestions that the stadium may also be named in honour of Yashin.³⁴ Of the original Constructivist design, only the West Stand with its famous façade will be retained within the newly configured stadium complex. As work commenced on the demolition of the old stadium, the monument to Yashin was removed to a nearby spot away from what has now become a building site and amongst the trees of Petrovskii Park. Whether it will be returned to its original site nearer to the new arena once this has been completed remains to be seen. Russia's bid to host the 2018 World Cup tournament was likely a key factor in the decision to rebuild the former Dinamo stadium and indeed the planned VTB Arena was written into the original FIFA bid. However, in September 2012, Russia announced the list of venues to host the tournament and, perhaps surprisingly, the VTB Arena was not amongst the two stadiums in Moscow designated to stage matches (*The Guardian*, 29 September 2012). There can be little doubt, however, that Yashin's name, and his importance for the history of Russian and Soviet soccer, will play a large part in the publicity surrounding the competition both in Russia and internationally. In April 2013, for example, Putin proposed to no less an institution than the Russian parliament that a feature film dedicated to the life of Lev Yashin be made to coincide with the build up to the tournament. Despite original objections from Yashin's widow, Valentina Yashina, the project is reportedly going ahead with plans to premiere the film at the VTB Arena on 22 October 2017, Yashin's birthday.³⁵ At the time of writing, the completion and release of this film is by no means certain, though the publicity value makes this highly likely. What is clear, however, is that as the world's attention focuses on Moscow for the duration of the 2018 tournament, the name of Yashin will once again ring loud across the global media. And this author, for

one, predicts a strong media focus on Rukavishnikov's monument as a fittingly complex, rich and visually engaging material manifestation of the links between a history of football in Russia and its significant representation in the field of art.

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1 Though selected for the USSR squad, the then forty-year old Yashin did not play at the 1970 World Cup finals in Mexico, though his experience was regarded as invaluable as a squad member.

2 At least three biographies of Yashin have been published in Russian in recent years. These include Asaulov (2008), Galedin (2014) and Soskin (2014).

3 Graham, 'Fragmentation of Russia', 39.

4 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 108-13

5 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 100-8

6 Forest and Johnson, 'Unravelling the Threads', 524-47.

7 For an account of this see O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR*.

8 For an overview of football in the late Tsarist period see McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, 102-7.

9 Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 82-120.

10 Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 26-56.

11 Riordan, *Sport in the USSR*, 66.

12 Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 221-36.

13 <http://www.offbeat.group.shef.ac.uk/statues> (accessed 28 January 2015).

14 Stride, Wilson and Thomas, *From Pitch to Plinth*, 148-60.

15 Moore, *Sport in Museums*, 93-106.

16 Wilson, *The Outsider*, 148-60.

17 For a critical analysis of this film see Haynes, 'Film as Political Football', 283-97.

18 Lyrics reproduced in von Geldern and Stites, *Mass Culture*, 236.

19 O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR*, 140-1.

20 O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR*, 158-60.

21 Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 110-11.

22 Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 39.

23 Romm, 'Creativity of Iosif Chaikov', 113.

24 Rozhin, *Alexander Rukavishnikov*, 32.

25 Rozhin, *Alexander Rukavishnikov*, 23.

26 Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 132.

27 It should be noted, however, that Starostin was protected from the worst excesses of camp life as a consequence of his footballing reputation; the football-loving camp commander instead recruited Starostin to coach the local football team. Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 132.

28 Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 235.

29 As Yashin's widow Valentina Yashina has indicated, Yashin's famous black jersey was in fact dark blue, and the famous flat cap he wore in his early days was stolen by a spectator during a pitch invasion following the Soviet Union's victory in the 1960 European Championship final. Rabiner, *The Jersey*.

30 Forest and Johnson, 'Unravelling the Threads', 533.

31 <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/vladimir-lenin-in-peril-of-red-square-eviction/article534038/>. Accessed 29.01.2015.

32 O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR*, 114-8.

33 Rozhin, *Alexander Rukavishnikov*, 8.

34 <http://itar-tass.com/en/sports/758418>. Accessed 29.01.2015.

35 <http://en.vtb-arena.com/press/news/film-about-lev-yashin>. Accessed 29.01.2015.